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**DEPARTMENT WINS NATIONAL AWARD FOR DOCUMENTARY FILM  
*THE LEGACY OF CHARLEY PELL***



**MONTGOMERY** – The Alabama Department of Mental Health and Mental Retardation has been cited as an award recipient in the National Voice Awards (<http://allmentalhealth.samhsa.gov/voiceawards/>) for its documentary film *The Legacy of Charley Pell*. The 17-minute film is narrated by sportscaster Herb Winches of Birmingham, Alabama and Ward Pell of Gadsden (Charley Pell's widow). It includes footage from Coach Pell's interviews on the Oprah Winfrey Show and ABC's Dateline with Stone Phillips. Charley Pell played football under the legendary Alabama coach Paul (Bear) Bryant and later became the youngest major college coach in the country. He led Jacksonville State University to a national championship, Clemson University and the University of Florida teams to conference and ultimately national championships. His drive to win was, however, a mask for a deeper problem, the illness of major depression.

After his departure from coaching and several business ventures, his illness manifested itself more intensely. Charley spent a year meticulously planning suicide. He attempted suicide and miraculously failed. Following that attempt Coach Pell went to an inpatient residential treatment program for 17 days and his life began to

change dramatically. In his recovery he became an advocate for people with mental illness and fought against the unwarranted stigma associated with the disease. This film presents Charley's struggle and recovery in a dignified, respectful, and accurate manner. It delivers the message loud and clear that mental illness is not a character flaw or sign of weakness. Rather, it is a treatable psychological and biological disorder that even the toughest athlete and coach can experience and overcome. The department has *The Legacy of Charley Pell* on its website viewable at the link: <http://www.mh.alabama.gov/video/LegacyOfCharleyPell.aspx>.

The Alabama High School Athletics Association has distributed the film to its affiliate Athletic Directors and will feature it at its upcoming summer conference for coaches. With depression being a major problem among youth the film may help reduce stigma and encourage students to seek help if symptoms occur. Alabama Department of Mental Health Commissioner, John Houston said, "We are very proud of receiving an Honorable Mention Citation in the Voice Awards. We had to compete in the 'entertainment industry' category whose recipients include programs like 'Law and Order' and 'Monk.' Coach Pell's story delivers a powerful and compelling message and that substantive element makes the film unforgettable."

The Voice Awards program, which began in 2005, has provided a unique opportunity to reduce stigma and promote recovery associated with mental health problems by acknowledging and celebrating the efforts of entertainment professionals who have helped support that movement. Sponsored by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), an agency of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, the Voice Awards recognize entertainment writers and producers who give a voice to people with mental health problems by incorporating dignified, respectful, and accurate portrayals of individuals with mental illnesses into film and television productions. In addition, the Voice Awards provide the opportunity to acknowledge the tireless efforts of mental health leaders to reduce the stigma and discrimination associated with mental health problems.

The awards ceremony is scheduled for May 28, 2008 at Paramount Studios in Hollywood, CA. This year's emcee will be Joe Pantoliano of the Sopranos and a lifetime award will be presented to Sally Field for her numerous performances and advocacy related to mental illness subject matter. Past Voice Award Ceremonies have been hosted by distinguished celebrities such as Kathleen Sullivan, a former television news anchor and member of the SAMHSA National Advisory Council who has bipolar disorder; Mariette Hartley, an Emmy Award-winning actress, author, playwright, and former news anchor who also has bipolar disorder; and Mariel Hemingway, an Academy Award-nominated actress, author, and granddaughter of legendary author Ernest Hemingway who has struggled with depression and whose family has a long history of mental illness. Writers and producers from 19 productions have received Voice Awards. In film, these productions include: "The Aviator," "Proof," "Stateside," "Legacy of the Harp," "There's No Such Thing as Crazy," and "Shadow Voices: Finding Hope in Mental Illness." In TV, they include "ER," "Law & Order: SVU," "Scrubs," "Monk," "Huff," and "Larry King Live." In radio, they include NPR's "Katrina & Recover," and One in Five's "Crazy for Life." Neal Baer, executive producer of "Law and Order: SVU" and former writer/producer

of “ER,” and David Hoberman, executive producer of “Monk” and producer of numerous hit movies such as “Raising Helen,” have been honored with Career Achievement Awards.

In addition, SAMHSA Special Recognition Awards have been given to Brooke Shields for her efforts to bring attention to postpartum depression; to Maurice Benard for his efforts on behalf of bipolar disorder; to Univision for its efforts to publicize mental health issues to the Hispanic community; to Patty Duke for her lifelong advocacy on the topic of mental illness; and to Ruta Lee for her efforts to support mental health and raise funds for mental health services for pediatric and geriatric care. The Voice Awards have also recognized mental health consumers whose leadership and advocacy have demonstrated that recovery is real and that people with mental health problems are valuable, contributing members of their schools, workplaces, and communities. Carmen Lee, founder and executive director of a non-profit mental health organization called Stamp Out Stigma, has been honored with a Lifetime Achievement Award.

### RESOURCES

For more information on the National Voice Awards, visit <http://allmentalhealth.samhsa.gov/voiceawards/>.

For more information about the Department of Mental Health and to see *The Legacy of Charley Pell*, visit <http://www.mh.alabama.gov>.

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